DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 606 CS 004 120

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TITLE Since They Are Going to Watch TV Anyway, Why Not Connect It To Reading.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 8p.; Study prepared at the University of Houston

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Auditory Discrimination; *Comprehension Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Language Arts; Language Skills; *Listening Skills; Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Teaching Models; *Television; *Television Viewing; Word Recognition

ABSTRACT

In view of the great amount of television viewing among poor readers, the Learning Model for Watching Television was developed to capitalize on students' television watching proclivities. The model encompasses three major overlapping component skill areas to reinforce classroom learning: active listening skills, auditory word recognition skills, and comprehension skills. A task sheet is distributed to each student on which to record his or her name, television program watched, the time of broadcast, and responses to tasks. Tasks range from auditory word recognition, such as listening for words beginning with certain consonants or for the number of times a character uses two syllable words, to comprehension skill tasks requiring students to note words that express certain emotions. Students should be encouraged to develop their own guides based on classroom learning, but the guides should always require active listening and should include either isolated word attack and comprehension skills or an integration of those skills. (A sample task sheet is appended.) (DF)

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Since They Are Going to Watch TV Anyway, Why Not Connect It to Reading?

Introduction

Two students attending a reading resource room were engaged in the following dialogue.

Sam: "What are you going to do tonight that's fun?"

Tina: "I'm watching my favorite TV shows.
I have two nightly shows that I watch every night.
What about you?"

Sam: "I'm going to do a quick job on my homework. 'Hope it's right the first time. Then, guess what? I'm watching TV, also. 'Can't wait."

Conversations such as this are typical among school-aged children, including those who read below their assigned grade levels. These students, who often attend reading resource rooms or other instructional areas for remedial readers, are frequently the ones who find that few instructional or recreational reading materials are based on their interests and actual instructional or independent reading levels, a fact which usually turns students off to reading. Thus, it seems that since they watch TV anyway, it would be a good instructional medium for these disinterested students. This article provides a rationale for using television as a means of instruction and also presents a model for capitalizing on television as a connection to reading.

Rationale

Across the country, newspapers have reported information that, sadly, reveals the facts that grades are declining and that students' reading levels for all grade levels are steadily dropping. In an attempt to answer

these dreadful headlines, a special advisory team was assigned by the College Entrance Examination Board to investigate the rapid decline in student performance on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests. The team's report, published in the September 6, 1977 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education, stated that there was no single cause for the decline in test scores. However, the team cited the considerable amount of time spent watching television (Fields, 1977) as a contributing factor. This opinion is supported by the fact that educators have considered television the electronic gadget responsible for the development of, for example, remedial readers, non-readers, and children with short attention spans.

Such a report is not surprising when we realize that approximately 96 per cent of the homes in the United States have at least one television set (Larrick, 1975). In fact, it is believed that more homes have televisions than have toilets or telephones (Larrick, 1975). Even more important, by the time most students complete twelve years of school, they have spent an average of 22,000 hours watching television, but only 11,000 hours in school (Larrick, 1975). Faced with these facts, educators must realize that it is of little use to teach as if television did not exist. Instead, we need to capitalize on those valuable 22,000 hours by connecting them to learning.

The Learning Model

The Learning Model for Watching Television is geared toward the student who watches many hours of television weekly with no "real purpose" in mind. By integrating reading components with the student's social interests, the model motivates the student and then directly relates his weekly television programs to his classroom instructional experiences. Therefore, the model is a reflection of the student's society and stresses

that the student become actively involved in learning by capitalizing upon experiences and favorite contemporary television friends.

The Learning Model for Watching Television encompasses three major overlapping component skill areas: (1) Active Listening Skills - This component should be integrated with auditory word recognition skills and comprehension skills; (2) Auditory Word Recognition Skills - This component can include areas that require the student to actively listen for words that have, for example, certain initial sounds, medial sounds, final sounds, number of syllables, or compound components; and, (3) Comprehension Skills - This component can include skills such as interpreting character feelings, locating details, ascertaining sequence, predicting outcomes, making inferences, locating cause-effect relationships, and forming sensory impressions.

In the Sample Task Sheet which follows, the student is asked to fill in his name, the name of the TV program he watched, and the time at which it was shown. Then he encounters his "Tasks" which provide him a "real purpose" for watching TV and which utilize this valuable time as a learning experience. Of course, the teacher could designate any number of words that begin with other letters, such as "d," "k," "th," or "bl," for example. Other auditory word recognition tasks might include listening for the number of times in two minutes that two-syllable words were repeated by a character, or listening for and listing five words (or any other number) with a long medial "a" sound (or any other sound). Likewise, another comprehension skill task could be to listen and record words that express happy, sad, thoughtful, or mean feelings, or to decide whether or not the student himself would like to be a certain character. Of course, in designing Task Sheets, the teacher should remember to assign only those tasks which reinforce skills already learned in class.

Sample Task Sheet

Name:_____

Title of TV program watched:_____

Time of program:_____

Objective: You are to watch a TV program and do the following activities.

AUDITORY WORD RECOGNITION SKILLS

1. Listen for and record 5 words that begin with the letter "M".

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____
   4._____
   5._____

2. Listen for 7 compound words and record them.

   1._____
   2._____
   3._____
   4._____
   5._____
   6._____
   7._____

COMPREHENSION SKILLS

1. Select a character and predict what he/she will probably do during the two days following the TV program you watched. Your prediction should be based on the content of the TV program. Take notes and be prepared to discuss your predition with two class peers on the following morning.

2. Decide on five things that could have happened to make the plot different. Take notes and be prepared to discuss your decision with two class peers.

Conclusion

The Learning Model for Watching Television is limited only by the creativity of the teacher or students. Students should be allowed to develop their own guides based on their classroom learning experiences. However, the guides should always require active listening and should include either isolated word attack and comprehension skills or an integration of them. Many additional activities can be added to produce purposeful viewing of television. In this way, teachers may make television work for students rather than against them.

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